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Vernon Fuller
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Place of Interview: Denton, Texas
Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello
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Oral History Collection

Vernon Fuller

Interviewer: Dr. Ronald E. Marcello

Place of Interview: Denton, Texas

Date: July 2, 1974

Dr. Marcello: This is Ron Marcello interviewing Vernon Fuller for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on July 2, 1974, in Denton, Texas. I'm interviewing Mr. Fuller in order to get his reminiscences and experiences and impressions while he was aboard the USS Argonne during the Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Mr. Fuller, to begin this interview why don't you just very briefly give me a biographical sketch of yourself. In other words, tell me when you were born, where you were born, your education--things of that nature. Just be very brief and general.

Mr. Fuller: I was born in South Bend, Texas, on May 31, 1921. My first schooling was in McCamey, Texas--the first three years. And we moved over to Longview in East Texas. I went to school in the fourth grade and then went down to Angleton near Houston. I went to the fifth, sixth, and seventh grades there. Then

we moved to Harlingen in the Rio Grande Valley. I went to the eighth, ninth, and tenth grade, and I finished high school in Stephenville at John Tarleton College.

Marcello: You finished high school at John Tarleton College?

Fuller: Yes, they had a high school section of John Tarleton. It was a junior college there at that time. Now it is Tarleton State, and I believe it is a four-year college, but at that time it was a junior college. They had a high school section there, and I got my high school diploma there.

Marcello: When did you enter the service? Was it immediately upon graduation?

Fuller: No, I graduated in 1940, and it was in January of 1941 that I joined the Navy.

Marcello: Why did you decide to join the Navy?

Fuller: At the time we were coming out of the . . . they say we was coming out of the Depression. My people were still in it (chuckle). There was very little that a high school graduate could do, and also that war in Europe had started, and I felt that we would be in it sooner or later, and although I wasn't draft age at the time, I went ahead and volunteered and went into the Navy.

Marcello: You know, these, I think, are the standard reasons that people of your generation give for having gone in the service, and in a great many instances it was a case of not being able to find work.

Fuller: That's right.

Marcello: The Depression was still going on at that particular time yet.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: Now why did you decide upon the Navy in particular as opposed to one of the other branches of the service?

Fuller: I always had a fascination for the sea, and, too, I didn't care too much about marching in the Army. I had talked to some boys that had been in the Navy, and the Navy had schools that after you were finished boot camp, you could go to, and I wanted to go to one of their schools, That's why I mainly joined the . . . selected the Navy.

Marcello: Where did you take your boot camp?

Fuller: San Diego, California.

Marcello: Was there anything eventful that happened during boot camp that you think ought to be a part of the record?

Fuller: Not that I can remember. I do remember one thing that's stuck with me. One of our chief petty officer instructors was talking about Naval gunnery and how it

was handled, and he mentioned that in the British Navy they anchored a target, and the ship moved by and would shoot at it. He said in the Japanese Navy, they anchored the ship and the target and shot at it. But he said that in the American Navy, the ship and the target are both moving. And he implied to us that that made us a lot better marksmen, which was not true as I found out as I was on a ship that the Japs sunk. We were a moving target, and they were moving, and they were extremely accurate!

Marcello: Where did you go from San Diego?

Fuller: After I got out of boot camp, I went to radio school, and when I finished radio school, I was transferred to Pearl Harbor on the USS Phoenix. When I got to Pearl Harbor, I was assigned to the USS Argonne in the communications gang.

Marcello: When did you get to the Hawaiian Islands?

Fuller: I believe it was in August of 1941.

Marcello: Going back to your boot camp for a minute, did you find that your training there was in the routine fashion, or did there seem to be a certain amount of emergency or an accelerated pace in your boot camp? In other words, did you get the feeling that most people there felt that we were going to get into war eventually? Was there a sense of urgency?

Fuller: I think so because there was a great number of boys who were coming from all over the United States, and the enlistments had swelled, and they had no problems of getting recruits. I feel that most of them felt that we were on the verge of war and that they would rather select their branch of the service.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you were first assigned aboard the USS Phoenix after you got out of radio school and then went from there to the Argonne?

Fuller: I was only on the Phoenix for transportation from California to Honolulu.

Marcello: I see. The Phoenix was a pretty nice vessel, as I recall. I've interviewed several people that were on the Phoenix.

Fuller: Yes, it was. I was real fascinated by it. They had a seaplane on it, and they had their catapult, and they would catapult this plane off. The pilot would go out then on scouting maneuvers, and we enjoyed watching that. It was a real trim, fighting ship. It seemed to be extremely clean and well-run.

Marcello: As you mentioned awhile ago then, you were transferred to the USS Argonne. What sort of a ship was the Argonne?

Fuller: It was, I believe, built originally as a cargo ship. It was being used when I went on it as more of a training

ship. In my division--the radio division--we had about seventy radiomen, which was way too many for a ship that size. We were trained in actual operation, and then most were then sent to other ships.

Marcello: In other words, this was a training ship of sorts.

Fuller: Of sorts, yes.

Marcello: Basically for communications people?

Fuller: Yes, I believe more so than any other division, it was radio and communications.

Marcello: I gather then that you were receiving a great deal of what we would call on-the-job training here aboard the USS Argonne.

Fuller: That's right.

Marcello: Did this ship ever leave Pearl Harbor?

Fuller: We went to sea occasionally and had maneuvers. Just a few months after I went aboard it, I was transferred to temporary duty to another ship, the USS Antares, and the Argonne went back to the West Coast for about two or three weeks for rest and relaxation.

Marcello: But I gather that later on you did come back aboard the USS Argonne again, and you were on it at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Fuller: When it returned, I went back on board the Argonne, yes.

Marcello: How would you describe the training that you received aboard the USS Argonne?

Fuller: We had a chief radioman. In fact, we had more than one. We had about three chief radiomen on there. Then we had several radiomen first class, several second class, and several third class radiomen. The new ones that went aboard went on as radio strikers. Our duties was . . . under supervision of the more experienced radiomen, we would copy Morse code from the . . . usually from the Honolulu radio station. We would practice sending code to other ships in the harbor.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how would you rate this on-the-job training that you received? Do you think that it was adequate? Was it excellent? Just how would you rate it?

Fuller: I think it was between adequate and excellent. We received . . . at the time we had some very efficient radiomen on board there.

Marcello: You were talking about chief petty officers awhile ago, and it's probably accurate to say that they all had a great many years of service.

Fuller: That's right. They had been in a good many years. You didn't get promotions very readily then, and anyone that had made it to chief petty officer was . . . he rated what he got. He earned it.

Marcello: Now while you were aboard the USS Argonne, did you notice any increased urgency in the training you received, as though you were training at an accelerated pace once again?

Fuller: The main thing that I can remember before there was any hint of war was a message that was put on the bulletin board in the radio shack that warned all the operators at all times to use extreme caution in their work. I remember it ended with the phrase, ". . . because this is a nation on the brink of war." We were cautioned to be extremely careful and accurate in everything we did.

Marcello: I would assume that as a radio operator you perhaps were privy to some rather important messages going back and forth between ships and shore and what have you.

Fuller: At that time, I was not. Everything was in code except messages--they would call them "plain language"--and they were known as ALNAV's, which meant to all the Navy. They were usually from the Secretary of the Navy or the Commander-in-Chief of the U.S. Fleet, which was known . . . at that time before Pearl Harbor, it was known as CINCUS. They used the initials, C-I-N-C-U-S, but after Pearl Harbor the CINCUS did not sound so well, so it was changed to COMINCH.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that from time to time the Argonne did accompany the fleet on maneuvers. What exactly did the Argonne do on these maneuvers?

Fuller: We had gunnery practice. The planes would pull a sleeve, and the anti-aircraft guns would fire at them. We would practice on . . . we had a direction finder. We would practice locating where our ships would be transmitting from and pinpoint the location of it.

Marcello: Normally, were you going out with the battleships and the cruisers and this sort of vessel and cooperating with them?

Fuller: Mostly with the destroyers and the cruisers. I don't believe we had any battleships in our maneuvers, just the smaller . . . the destroyers and cruisers.

Marcello: How often did these maneuvers usually take place?

Fuller: About every three months.

Marcello: In other words, there was really no accelerated pace as one got closer and closer to Pearl Harbor. These maneuvers were still within their regular routine.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: I was fascinated about what you mentioned awhile ago concerning that message that appeared on the bulletin board, as I think you mentioned. I'm referring to the message that said, " . . . this nation is on the brink

of war," or something to that effect. How much importance did you give to this message? How seriously did you take it?

Fuller: I felt . . . it shook me up. We had . . . anyway, we had no-nonsense-type of chief petty officers and radiomen first class, and we really took to heart what they said because most of us had come in because we wanted to, and we accepted the Navy for what it was. We weren't forced into it, and we respected the men that were in charge of us.

Marcello: How would you rate the morale of this peacetime Navy, at least among the servicemen that you came in contact with?

Fuller: It was good. I think it was excellent.

Marcello: And how do you account for this? Was it because of the fact that most of you were volunteers, and you mentioned just a moment ago?

Fuller: I believe it was. I would have to say that it was because we all . . . if anyone complained too much, he'd say, "Well, you came in of your own free will. So you've got your own self to blame if you don't like it." At the time I went in, the Navy only accepted volunteers with a high school diploma. I believe that might have had something to do with it.

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because they'd seem to have a . . . more of a high type of individual.

Marcello: It is your opinion that morale was pretty good in the Navy outside of the usual gripes and complaints that you would find under any circumstances.

Fuller: Yes, I think most everyone was proud of the Navy.

Marcello: Getting back to this message again, that is, the message stating that " . . . this nation is on the brink of war," how safe did you feel at Pearl Harbor?

Fuller: I didn't really have any qualms about Pearl Harbor. I didn't really give any thought to Pearl Harbor being attacked. I thought perhaps the Philippines would be first, and we would have ample time to do something if it came to war. I was greatly shocked that this attack came at Pearl Harbor. I didn't think about it.

Marcello: Without putting words in your mouth then, you felt relatively secure at Pearl Harbor, since it was probably going to be thousands of miles away from the action.

Fuller: That is right.

Marcello: If war did come, did you think it would come with Japan, or were you still looking toward Germany and the European situation?

Fuller: I believe we looked more to Japan in the Pacific.

Marcello: How closely were you keeping abreast with world events through the newspapers or radio or what have you?

Fuller: I've always listened to the radio and read the daily paper. I kept up with it day-to-day.

Marcello: When you and your buddies got around in bull sessions and talked about the possibilities of war, what seemed to be the general opinion of the Japanese as individuals or even as a nation?

Fuller: They were underrated, as we found out later. They weren't taken . . . I think they were taken lightly.

Marcello: When you thought of an individual Japanese, what sort of a person usually came to mind?

Fuller: More of a sinister-type individual that couldn't be trusted.

Marcello: Did you ever talk very much about the capabilities of the Japanese Navy or anything of this nature?

Fuller: We heard of it through old-time sailors that had been in, say, twenty years. They weren't overly impressed with them. They seemed to have been brought up that the United States Navy could handle any situation.

Marcello: Now, of course, the Hawaiian Islands had a relatively large percentage of people of Japanese ancestry. Was very much thought ever given to these people as being a potential source of trouble, that is, perhaps as saboteurs or fifth columnists or something of this nature? Now I'm sure the Navy would not have been as much concerned with this sort of thing as would have

been the Army or the Air Corps, which was actually located on the islands themselves.

Fuller: From my own point of view, I never did think of them too much as being saboteurs.

Marcello: When the USS Argonne was at anchor in Pearl Harbor, where was it usually located?

Fuller: It was docked at a wharf there known as 1010 (Ten-Ten) dock.

Marcello: This 1010 dock must have been a pretty big one because there were a lot of ships located there.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: What other ships were located there around you at 1010 dock?

Fuller: There was . . .

Marcello: When I say what other ships, were there other ships similar to yours, or were there repair ships or what sort of ships--cruisers? What was located there?

Fuller: None of the fighting ships were located there. We did have an old ship. Her name was the Oglala, which was across from us.

Marcello: Is this the one that later on they said died of fright or something like that? It was sunk because it was frightened to death?

Fuller: (chuckle) Turned over on its side, yes. The Oglala was there. I don't recall right at that time of any

of the others. This one I was on--the Antares--when she was in port, she usually docked there.

Marcello: And what kind of a ship was the Antares?

Fuller: It was a cargo ship.

Marcello: I would assume that on a given day, especially as one got closer and closer to December 7, 1941, that Pearl Harbor was a beehive of activity. It wasn't a very big harbor. There were all sorts of ships moving in and out of there all the time, I guess.

Fuller: Yes, it was lots going on there. Over on the side we were on they had the drydocks and big cranes, and there was lots of maintenance and repair work going on.

Marcello: You must have been over there near the USS Pennsylvania then?

Fuller: The Pennsylvania was on farther up towards the drydocks, as I can remember.

Marcello: It was in drydock at the time of Pearl Harbor.

Fuller: Yes, that's right. It was. It was up . . . would have been up ahead of the Argonne.

Marcello: Where was the Argonne located with regard to Battleship Row?

Fuller: If you've seen these pictures of how Pearl Harbor is laid out, in the center is Ford Island, which is the

Naval Air Station, and the battleships were on along the side of Ford Island. We were across on the mainland side, across from Ford Island.

Marcello: Now from what you've mentioned earlier, I would gather that the Argonne normally did not get out to sea too often.

Fuller: No.

Marcello: That is, in comparison to the rest of the ships of the battle fleet, let's say.

Fuller: She did not, no.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what sort of liberty did you receive when the Argonne was in port?

Fuller: We were free, oh, about three nights a week.

Marcello: How about on the weekend?

Fuller: About one out of three weekends.

Marcello: In other words, you got one weekend out of every three.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: But you didn't get such a thing as port-and-starboard liberty or anything of that nature? I know a lot of ships, of course, maintained port-and-starboard liberty.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: They would have either a Friday or a Saturday off.

Fuller: Just to be honest, I don't remember if there was, but I don't believe we had every . . . you know, part of

every weekend off because we had . . . we were on duty, but being on the Argonne as a radio striker, I didn't . . . I couldn't get off as often as . . .

Marcello: The radiomen?

Fuller: . . . the radiomen, right.

Marcello: Generally speaking, how did you spend your time in Honolulu when you had liberty?

Fuller: I usually . . . I liked to go swimming. I'd go to Waikiki Beach. Nearly everyone made their headquarters over at the YMCA. They had a big YMCA there. And I took in movies, and sometimes we would go out around the island, but mostly I never did spend the night. I always went back to the ship at night. Some of them that had connections there would stay overnight, but I never did know any civilians there. I would usually . . . if it was a Saturday afternoon or a Sunday afternoon, I would usually go swimming and then take in a movie and then after that go on back to the ship.

Marcello: Was this standard procedure for most of your shipmates? In other words, did most of them, even when they had liberty, go back aboard the ship at night?

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: I think we have to keep in mind that you weren't getting paid very much during this period.

Fuller: That's right, \$21.00 once a month.

Marcello: And I gather that \$21.00 a month, despite whatever the cost of living was, still didn't go very far in Honolulu.

Fuller: No, things were higher over there. You had to watch what you were doing. You couldn't do a whole lot--just movies and a few things like that. The YMCA usually had entertainment going on there.

Marcello: Generally speaking, on a weekend did very many of the crew members come back to the ship inebriated?

Fuller: I'm sure some of them . . . yes, some of them did. Most of them my age, if they had one bottle of beer, well, they tried to swagger around. At that time, just speaking for myself, I never could stand to taste the stuff, and I'd rather have a chocolate malt in those days (chuckle). But if you're maybe thinking that they were caught because of drunkenness, I don't believe that would have caused it.

Marcello: Well, this is a point that I think needs to get in the record because I think it is very important, and you're simply reinforcing what most of the other people have told me, also. Yes, there certainly were people who came back aboard on a weekend drunk, but this was the exception by far rather than the general rule. As they put it, even those who did come back inebriated were young enough that they could recover quickly, and

probably the next morning they were in fairly good shape. But I think this is an important point to get into the record because so many people think that one of the reasons that surprise was achieved was because of the wild night ashore on the Saturday before the Sunday of the attack.

Fuller: I went ashore that Saturday night. I remember it. I'd been out there long enough that the glamour of the islands had worn off, and I was getting a little homesick, and I remember thinking when I was waiting for the bus to come back, I just said to myself, "I just wish something would happen. I wish we'd either get in it or get out and get off of dead center here for awhile."

Marcello: In other words, this was actually on your mind that Saturday night before the actual attack took place?

Fuller: Yes, I . . .

Marcello: That's rather coincidental.

Fuller: Yes, I didn't have any idea. I didn't have any inkling of it at all, but I was just kind of . . . been there long enough that I was getting a little bored with it.

Marcello: Now how often did you get paid? You mentioned awhile ago that you got paid once a month. Do you recall when your payday was?

Fuller: I sure don't.

Marcello: Was it usually the first of the month or the last day of the month? If it was once a month, then most likely it was probably the first, I would assume.

Fuller: Yes, it probably was, but I don't recall . . . by that . . . that would've been a week after payday. We'd just have it all spent by then (chuckle).

Marcello: Okay. This is the point I wanted to make. Generally speaking, a week after payday, how much money would you normally have left?

Fuller: Not much.

Marcello: Well, again, this reinforces, I think, this business about the drunkenness on the night of December 6, let's say. You probably didn't have too much money to spend even if you wanted to go out and get drunk.

Fuller: That's right. But I don't recall any great amount of drunkenness at any time.

Marcello: And here again, I think we have to keep in mind that aboard your particular ship were men who had not been to sea for extended periods.

Fuller: That's right.

Marcello; In other words, the battleships and some of the cruisers had usually been out all week, and they would come in on the weekends, and probably a great many o those guys were ready to go, so to speak.

Fuller: Right.

Marcello: As you get closer and closer to Pearl Harbor, did your routine vary any? In other words, were there more alerts? Were you instructed to be more cautious with regard to the radio messages you received or sent or what you heard or things of this nature?

Fuller: It seemed that we . . . the chief radioman in charge-- the one in charge--he seemed to be under a strain, and he may have been briefed on something that he . . . and never . . . the word never got on down at least to me, but he seemed to be more under a burden to see that everything was going right.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you were receiving a great many coded messages, and when you're referring to coded messages, are you referring strictly to Morse code or some of the other types of more intricate codes?

Fuller: No, no. Of course, all of it came in Morse code, but plain language was what you could type and read. But the other was in five-letter groups that had . . .

Marcello: Had absolutely nothing to do . . .

Fuller: . . . no meaning to it. It would have to be decoded.

Marcello: Where would these messages be taken?

Fuller: From the radio shack, they would be taken up to the bridge in the communications room, and the communications officer would decode them.

Marcello: In other words, you did have specialists aboard the Argonne who knew the codes.

Fuller: Yes. The codes . . . decoding a message was no big deal if you had the table, you know, because later on in a year or two after that on down in the South Pacific, I decoded many messages myself, and there was no real problem to it. Just having the material to decode it with was the key.

Marcello: But you never had any access to these coded messages aboard the USS Argonne.

Fuller: Not before.

Marcello: Okay, I think this more or less brings us up to the days immediately prior to Pearl Harbor. Now what I want you to do at this point is to describe in as much detail as you can remember what you did on Saturday, December 6, 1941, from the time you get up in the morning until the time you turned in that evening. After you get through that routine, then we'll go on and talk about the Sunday of December 7. Anyway, let's start with Saturday, December 6, and as best you can, recall what your routine was on that particular day.

Fuller: At that time I was on duty from eight o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon. We got up about six and ate breakfast, and we would get

ready to go on duty, go on watch at eight. You go on watch at eight, and we had to copy all the messages that came over from the radio station--I think it was NPM in Honolulu. They sent an almost continuous broadcasting, and when some of the smaller ships would come in that had only one to two radiomen on board, and they were in our vicinity, well, they would get permission to secure their radio. Since we had a great number of radiomen--and we made several copies--we would stand radio guard for these other small ships. We would copy the messages continuously as long as we were on watch.

Marcello: And this generally was what your routine consisted of when you were on duty.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: Now I know that on the ships of the battle fleet there were usually inspections every week. I think they were usually held when? On a Saturday morning maybe. You'd get ready for them on Friday, and they were held on a Saturday morning. Did your ship undergo or take part in these inspections?

Fuller: Yes, we had regular inspections. I don't recall on board ship how often they were, but it would consist of . . . well, they had two or three different types of inspections. Sometimes they would inspect your

clothing locker; sometimes they'd inspect your bunk; and then sometimes they'd inspect your duty station. We had our regular cleaning station which was, of course, the radio shack. It had to be swabbed and waxed and cleaned every day. I didn't have a duty station that had any connection with being ready for battle as far as firing the guns.

Marcello: What was your normal battle station?

Fuller: To man a radio circuit.

Marcello: I would assume that this was the type of battle station of a great many of the people on that ship since it was basically a communications ship.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: How important would this ship be to the rest of the fleet? What is the importance of this particular type of ship to the rest of the fleet? Does it have more sophisticated radio equipment aboard than one of the other vessels?

Fuller: No. I would say that its primary importance would have been in the training of communications personnel for small or other ships that had need of them.

Marcello: Okay. In other words, you were kind of like a feeder. You fed trained radiomen and other communications personnel to the ships of the fleet.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: Now eventually would you have been going on to some other ship yourself? I think you did, did you not?

Fuller: I did about, I would say, within two months. I don't remember exactly. Within two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, I went to another ship.

Marcello: In other words, like you mentioned earlier, this was on-the-job training for you.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: Okay, so continue with your routine on that Saturday of December 6. You had the watch?

Fuller: Yes. It was pretty much routine. The radio strikers were responsible for making coffee. That was one of the duties (chuckle). We had to get the coffee made and copy the messages. If there was a message of importance to one of the ships that we were standing communications guard for, one of us would deliver the message to it. We would . . . well, we'd deliver it right away if it concerned one directly, but if they were just routine messages, we would deliver them, oh, about twice a day--just all that had come in--and deliver them to the ships.

Marcello: Were most of the messages on that particular day while you were on duty of a routine variety?

Fuller: Yes. No urgent messages that I recall.

Marcello: In other words, it was more or less business as usual aboard the USS Argonne that day.

Fuller: Right.

Marcello: Okay, so when did you get off your duty, or when did you secure, to use the Navy term?

Fuller: About five o'clock. Then I ate supper and cleaned up and went into Honolulu, and as near as I can remember, I was by myself because I remember thinking about wishing that I could get away from there for awhile. But mainly I remember going to the YMCA and then going to a movie and about ten o'clock coming back. No hint of anything that I can remember. Nothing.

Marcello: Nothing extraordinary happened on the ship that night so far as personnel coming in or anything of that nature?

Fuller: No, no.

Marcello: Okay, this kind of brings us up then to December 7, 1941, and once more I'll ask you to go through your routine on that particular day, from the time you get up until all hell broke loose.

Fuller: Well, I had to go on duty at eight, and a friend of mine, George Bosch, from . . . we'd gone through boot camp together. We had just eaten breakfast, and the mess hall was one deck below the topside. We came up on topside and then went up the ladder to the deck

where the radio shack was, and we were standing out on deck on Sunday morning. You know, it was a beautiful sight to see the sun and everything so calm there. We were standing along the rail, and they always sounded colors on one of the battleships, so the bugler had started sounding colors.

Marcello: You could hear this even from your location?

Fuller: Yes, it was real calm and still there, and the sound just carried, and you knew the colors had been sounded. And you stop and salute the flag while it's being raised. While we were saluting, I noticed two planes that came in a dive down towards the hangar on Ford Island. I didn't think too much about it. I just looked out of the corner of my eye at them, and I said to myself, "Say, bud, you better wait until after colors to do that." You know, I thought it was just Navy planes. The lead plane, he kicked loose a bomb, and it fell in the water right next to the hangar, and it still didn't dawn on me what it was.

Marcello: You heard the explosion and all this?

Fuller: Yes, I saw the bomb, and I heard the explosion, and I thought to myself, "Man, they're sure getting realistic in these practices." And the second bomb . . . the second plane, his bombs hit right in the center of the hangar, and you probably have seen the pictures.

Everything just went straight up. It still didn't dawn on me what was going on. I thought "Man! Somebody's sure going to get into trouble!" Then after he did that, well, they banked, and when they banked, you could see the rising sun on their wings, and that was the first time it dawned on me that it was the Japs.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you saw this, that they were Japanese planes?

Fuller: The first thing I . . . my knees started shaking (chuckle). I didn't know . . . I couldn't feature that happening, and so there was . . . there was a gunnery officer. He came up on deck about that time, and he sounded general alarm, battle stations. Everyone started running to their battle stations.

I didn't say this awhile ago, but we had just come back a few days before that from being out on one of these infrequent maneuvers. When they had gotten back, they had taken all the antiaircraft ammunition back to the magazine below decks. They opened up an ammunition rack there, and it was empty. There was not a thing in it.

Marcello: This was standard procedure, though, was it not?

Fuller: Yes, they would take it back down to the magazine. So that was the first thing to do. We started bringing

that antiaircraft ammunition back up there, and without . . . I didn't have time. I was supposed to have gone right to the radio station, since it was my battle station. But this gunnery officer, he told everybody to handle . . . to start passing ammunition.

Marcello: Generally speaking, to get ammunition from the storage spaces up to the guns themselves, did all this have to be hand-carried?

Fuller: Yes . . .

Marcello: In other words, your gunnery was not sophisticated or large enough that you had to have hoists or anything of this nature?

Fuller: No, we weren't primarily a fighting ship. We had the antiaircraft guns on there. I think they were five-inch guns, but they didn't consider . . . now this is my point of view. They didn't consider that they would be initiating any action, and so they would've thought probably that they would have had time to get the ammunition to the guns by hand-carrying it, and that's the way we did it. But it was just a few minutes till they had started a stream of ammunition up there, and they began to fire. So even though they were caught by surprise, I think the reaction was pretty good when everyone realized what was happening.

Marcello: How much time had elapsed from your initial sighting of these Japanese planes until your ship actually started firing? You would have to estimate this.

Fuller: Yes. It was five to ten minutes because they had to bring the ammunition from the magazine up.

Marcello: In general, how would you describe the reaction of the men aboard the USS Argonne? Was it one of panic? Fear? Professionalism?

Fuller: I'd say it was just momentarily panic, but the minute the general alarm sounded, they reacted and went to their battle stations and carried out their orders just like they would at any time in practice.

Marcello: Okay, so the men are now on their guns, and they're firing at the Japanese planes. What happened from this point? What did you do? Were you still continuing to serve as carrying ammunition?

Fuller: I did, I'd say, for maybe thirty minutes, and the . . .

Marcello: In the meantime, did the Argonne come under direct attack from Japanese planes?

Fuller: No, it never did.

Marcello: In other words, they were after bigger game.

Fuller: They were after the battleships and the cruisers, but they probably would have taken anything later on that they could get. But one thing stands out. We had this

huge crane was right next . . . real close to us--the one that lifted the ships out of drydock, these smaller ones. I'm sure that they didn't want to dive down too close and get entangled in that crane.

Marcello: You mentioned now that you had been handling ammunition for about a half-hour, and then from there you went to your regular battle station?

Fuller: The radiomen in charge, the chief petty officer, when he came in and took charge, he started checking out where all his men were. This one gun was right near the radio shack anyway, and when he saw me there, he told me, "Come on in here," and he said, "I want you to try to run this direction finder and see if you can pick up any Japanese transmissions so they can try to get a fix on them,"

Marcello: Now from this point on, you were probably inside and didn't see too much of what was happening outside?

Fuller: I was inside a great part of the time. Occasionally, when I could, I went out to take a look. I had to see what was going on (chuckle). I would go out to the rail when I'd take a little break. It was real bad! All the battleships were burning. Some had turned over.

Marcello: About how far were you from the battleships? Again, you would probably have to estimate this.

Fuller: Yes. My estimate is . . . it's been a long time since I've been there, but I'd say it was about a quarter of a mile across the harbor there between Ford Island and the mainland side.

Marcello: What were your feelings when you did manage to look out and see the extent of the damage that was being done there? You were young at the time, but certainly it must have made some sort of an impression upon you.

Fuller: Well, I had a feeling for . . . I knew that there was bound to have been lots of them killed over there, especially on the Arizona, because it was the one that I could see the best. I could see most of them, but you know, there was black smoke and fire shooting from it and all, I knew that there was lots of them over there being killed. The main thing, I just felt sorry for those and a kind of helpless feeling that you could do nothing, that you didn't think you could do anything to help.

Marcello: I'm sure that a great many people had this feeling of helplessness.

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: You mentioned awhile ago that you had been working the direction finder to see if you could pick up any Japanese radio transmissions. Were you successful in picking up any?

Fuller: No. If they did any transmission, we didn't pick it up.

Marcello: Generally speaking, what sort of messages would be moving back and forth during a period like this in the room where you were?

Fuller: Most of them were from the commander-in-chief of the Pacific Fleet, CINCPAC, they called him.

Marcello: Is this Admiral Kimmel?

Fuller: Yes. They were coming from his headquarters. Most of them concerned getting all the ships that were seaworthy out of the harbor.

Marcello: In other words, these messages would come from CINCPAC, to the Argonne, and then to the other ships?

Fuller: At that time we were just taking messages . . . after the attack, we were just taking messages directed to ourselves. They were coming from . . . Radio Honolulu was transmitting.

Marcello: In other words, they were transmitting directly to the other ships, and you were simply intercepting these messages.

Fuller: Yes, in fact, most of it was addressed to all ships in this area or something to that effect.

Marcello: I see. In other words, other ships would have been receiving these same messages that you were receiving.

Fuller: Yes, yes.

Marcello: Okay, so we mentioned a while ago the USS Oglala, which was close by. Could you describe the fate of the Oglala?

Fuller: I don't know what hit her, but I guess it was like . . .

Marcello: I'm not sure if anything really hit it.

Fuller: I don't know. But like the Pennsylvania was in dry-dock down there, and she was hurt pretty badly, and the Oglala was backing out, trying to get out of the way, when she turned over on her side (chuckle) there. I never did know really what happened to her.

Marcello: Did you witness this or did you just see the aftermath of it?

Fuller: I saw it backing up, and then I saw it on its side, but I never did know . . . I didn't think much about it then. There was so much going on that I just thought she had been hit by something.

Marcello: Now I think what we've been describing up to this point has been the first Japanese attack, that is, the first wave. Then, of course, there was a lull in the fighting, and then there was a second attack. What happened during the lull so far as your own role was concerned?

Fuller: I stayed in the radio shack and continued to try to pick up any Japanese transmission.

Marcello: You were hoping, I suppose, to pick up some shipboard transmissions to find out where those Japanese planes had come from?

Fuller: Yes. That's right. We were trying to find the location of the carriers, just about where the carriers were.

Marcello: And as you mentioned, you had no success in doing that.

Fuller: No.

Marcello: They obviously were still maintaining some sort of radio silence?

Fuller: I think they did. From the reports I've heard, they didn't break radio silence.

Marcello: Okay then, so during the lull you were still trying to locate these Japanese ships by means of the direction finder, and then, of course, there was the second attack. How was the USS Argonne involved in the second attack?

Fuller: Our guns continued to fire at the planes. We were situated in such a way that we could fire at those torpedo planes--or the gunners could--where they'd come down low to drop their torpedoes. They continued to fire at them all during the attack.

Marcello: I would assume that a great deal of ammunition was expended by the gunners aboard the Argonne

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: You obviously didn't have too many antiaircraft guns aboard that ship.

Fuller: No, no, we didn't. I don't know how many, but it wasn't equipped as a fighting ship.

Marcello: During the second attack, were you still inside the radio room?

Fuller: Inside, yes.

Marcello: Was the Argonne ever attacked directly, that is, was it ever strafed or anything of this nature?

Fuller: No.

Marcello: They were still after the bigger game, and even though you were throwing up some fire at these Japanese planes, they were virtually ignoring the Argonne.

Fuller: That's right. They probably had their orders and the maps and who to attack, and they didn't go after anyone else. They knew what they wanted, and that's where they were going.

Marcello: I guess they got medals for sinking the USS Arizonas of the world, but they didn't get many medals for sinking the USS Argonnes.

Fuller: No.

Marcello: That's not to put down your ship, but like I mentioned earlier, they were after bigger game.

Fuller: That's right. They weren't . . .

- Marcello: What happened in the aftermath of the attack?
- Obviously, after things had quieted down, you must have at least gone outside and looked around and were able to survey the extent of the damage. It must have been a rather sickening thing.
- Fuller: It was. We had all of the available whale boats as they called them--motor boats--dispatched to these ships to pick up the men in the water and any that could get off, and our ship acted kind of as a receiving ship for the ones that had nowhere to go. The wounded, of course, they took them on to the hospitals, and, of course, they picked up a lot of dead ones--the dead that already died in the water. They were just stacked on the docks until they could take them on. But there just wasn't a whole lot we could do then. The damage had been done.
- Marcello: What were your feelings toward the Japanese as a result of the attack, that is, your immediate feelings?
- Fuller: Anger and hatred. You would like to retaliate in some way.
- Marcello: What did you personally have to do in the aftermath of the attack? What was your particular duty?
- Fuller: It was strictly in the radio shack. I stayed in there and stayed on duty till things had calmed down and the attack was over. So we had to get some rest,

and I went down to our compartment. The sleeping compartment was two decks down. It was one deck below the mess hall, and I was laying down, and gunfire started again. All of us jumped up and made a run for the topside.

We got up to the mess hall, and there was a fellow in front of me. He was from the USS Oklahoma. He'd come over there after she was sunk. He fell right at the top of the ladder going into the mess hall, and I thought he'd stumbled, and so . . . but he never got up. I had to pull him over to one side so the rest of them could get up. They found out that that he was shot! So we were just dumbfounded at what had happened.

A while later, somebody found out that . . . the reason for the gunfire was that the planes from our aircraft carriers were coming in, and it was so disorganized that no one knew it, and they started firing on time. And a gun . . . they surmised that one of the antiaircraft guns on . . . you know, the Arizona was still after . . . she was still . . . I guess some of her antiaircraft guns on topside was in operation. They shot through about a three-quarter-inch steel hull on the Argonne, and it pierced that and come over there and hit that fellow in the heart and killed him in the mess hall.

Marcello: I'm sure that there were alot of trigger-happy servicemen around that night.

Fuller: Yes, they were (chuckle). I for one . . . I don't know about the rest of them, but I stayed on topside the rest of the night. I wouldn't go back down in that mess hall again because I didn't know what was coming up. I'd rather be on topside where I could at least see what was happening (chuckle).

Marcello: What were some of the wild rumors that you heard making the rounds during that night. I'm sure that the whole area must have just been a hotbed of rumors.

Fuller: They were mostly concerned whether the Japanese were going to invade the Hawaiian Islands.

Marcello: And I'm sure you believed every rumor you heard.

Fuller: Yes. We were looking for them on every corner (chuckle).

Marcello: Incidentally, what percentage of the ship's complement was ashore when the attack took place on that Sunday morning? Again, you would probably have to estimate this.

Fuller: Yes. I would estimate that it would be less than 10 per cent. Most of them were young and had no connections out there and always came back to the ship to stay overnight.

Marcello; How about the officers? Were most of them usually ashore when you were in port on a weekend?

Fuller: I suppose so. The usual percentage would . . . they probably had more connections over there than an enlisted man would, and probably more of them would stay overnight.

Marcello: When you're speaking of connections, you're speaking in terms of families and this sort of thing?

Fuller: Yes.

Marcello: How do you think the Japanese were able to pull off this attack? How do you explain their success?

Fuller: I've thought about that a whole lot. I think that it probably lay in the top command in Pearl Harbor. I'm talking about the top command as . . .

Marcello: Admiral Kimmel and General Short?

Fuller: . . . Admiral Kimmel and General Short, and I have no way of knowing this, but I just think that they had become overconfident and relaxed. I've often wondered why we didn't have search planes out twenty-four hours a day when we felt that we were nearing war, and why we didn't have our submarines patrolling all through that water, and why some of our other ships weren't patrolling constantly. I have blamed this top command for that because I think that the lower officers, had they been able to, would have had such a force out--a security force out--to see that we weren't suprised. It was just, I guess, just

self-indulgence on the part of the top leaders, is all I can see that caused it.

Marcello: One last question. As serious as Pearl Harbor was, did you witness any funny incidents that took place aboard the USS Argonne during the attack, that is, did you see people do things that they perhaps ordinarily wouldn't have done and in the aftermath of which seemed rather funny?

Fuller: I don't recall any right during the attack. About maybe two weeks later, after things had calmed down again, there was a movie showing in the mess hall, and it happened to be Sergeant York. Are you familiar with that? Lots of shooting in that. While it was showing, a barrage opened up in the movie, and we had a bunch that had already gone to sleep down there, and they heard that, they came charging back up (chuckle) the ladder, thinking that we were under attack again.

Marcello: So even that late after the attack the men were still jittery.

Fuller: Yes.